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ABSTRACT

Recent research in classroom discipline tends to show that discipline is a by-product of effective instruction and classroom management. The five publications reviewed in this annotated bibliography explore aspects of the complex classroom environment that relate to student discipline. Walter Doyle's chapter on "Classroom Organization and Management" in the third edition of the "Handbook of Research on Teaching" synthesizes the relationship among management, student engagement, and discipline. An Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, "The Challenge of Classroom Discipline," focuses on common principles of classroom discipline and urges educators to use and disseminate the available base of proven techniques. Jere Brophy and Mary Rohrkemper investigate teachers' strategies for dealing with the hostile-aggressive student. Timothy Turco and Stephen Elliott look at discipline from the other side, surveying students to discover what kinds of interventions are most acceptable to children. Finally, in "The Intern Teacher Casebook," details of early classroom conflicts are recorded by teachers in training along with commentary by outside observers. (MLF)

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Classroom Discipline

Talbot Bielefeldt

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RESEARCH roundup

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Classroom Discipline

Talbot Bielefeldt

The thrust of recent research in classroom discipline has been to play down the significance of the subject as a topic unto itself. Not that discipline is of any less concern, either to classroom teachers or to the public. But classroom observations tend to show that discipline is a byproduct of effective instruction and classroom management.

This line of inquiry began with the work of Jacob Kounin (*Discipline and Group Management in Classrooms*, 1970), who videotaped classes in progress and then coded the events and behaviors that took place. Kounin found that individual interventions to prevent disruptive behavior were not the key to classroom management. More effective teachers were characterized by the ability to anticipate, organize, and maintain the flow of classroom events. Following Kounin's lead, other researchers extended observational studies into experimental interventions. The results of these efforts are reviewed in the two summary articles abstracted here.

The appearance of Walter Doyle's chapter on "Classroom Organization and Management" in the third edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teaching* was a watershed in classroom management research, synthesizing several lines of work and pointing the way to new areas of inquiry. Its very existence—there was no such chapter in the second edition—testifies to the growth of this field in the last decade. The Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, *The Challenge of Classroom Discipline*, focuses on common principles of classroom discipline that emerge from these years of activity and urges educators to use and disseminate the available base of proven techniques.

The question arises: Given what we know about classroom management, why do our "proven techniques" fail in some classrooms? New research is reaching out to explore other aspects of the complex classroom environment, including teacher preparation and teacher/student relationships. Jere Brophy and Mary Rohrkemper investigate teachers' favored strategies for dealing with one of the most intimidating of individuals, the hostile-aggressive student. Timothy Turco and Stephen Elliott look at discipline from the other side, surveying students to discover what kinds of interventions are most acceptable to children.

As with all formal correlational observations, these studies are limited in scope and cautious in recommendations. A more free-wheeling type of investigation appears in *The Intern Teacher Casebook*, where teachers in training record the details of early classroom conflicts and encounters. Commentary by outside observers relates these very personal vignettes to larger issues and general principles.

As seen from these studies, the past two decades of studying discipline-as-group-management may have brought us back to the beginning of renewed interest in individual discipline issues. Discipline will not suddenly stop being a classroom management problem, but achievement in this area of research has given teachers and administrators plenty of knowledge to assimilate and apply while investigators expand their studies and take on new questions.

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1 Doyle, Walter. "Classroom Organization and Management." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (3rd edition), edited by M. C. Wittrock. 392-431. New York: Macmillan, 1986.

Any reading of recent journal articles on discipline sooner or later turns up a quote from or reference to Walter Doyle's synthesis of the relationship between management, student engagement, and discipline. "Classroom management is fundamentally a process of solving the problem of order in classrooms rather than the problems of misbehavior or student engagement . . . . Indeed, high engagement and low levels of inappropriate and disruptive behavior are by-products of an effective program of classroom organization and management."

In arriving at his conclusion, Doyle reviews a forbidding amount of research, including his own substantial contributions. The key to order appears to lie in understanding the complexity and volatility of the classroom environment and its profound effect on student and teacher behavior. Relying heavily on studies by Jacob Kounin, Edmund Emmer, Carolyn Evertson, Jere Brophy, and other classroom observers, he notes that effective classroom managers anticipate events, establish and explain rules and routines early in the school year, monitor the entire group, plan lessons well, and orchestrate the flow of classroom activities for continuity. Individual interventions to stop disruptive behavior, while essential, will not create order in a classroom where it has not already been established. Furthermore, what constitutes order and disruption is context-specific and can only be defined in relation to the "program of action" intended for the classroom.

While he is made sanguine by the growth of classroom management research, Doyle suggests seven areas of future inquiry: (1) the details of management actions and interventions; (2) the cognitive models teachers have of the management process; (3) different contexts—grade levels, locales, times of year; (4) how management varies across contexts; (5) the relationship of academic work to management; (6) the school/classroom relationship; and (7) teacher preparation and staff development.

It is important to point out that a unique value of this article is its location in one volume among so many other resources. The encyclopedic *Handbook* allows readers to cross-reference many ideas in neighboring chapters. Given Doyle's emphasis on the importance of the classroom *milieu*, the articles on "Teacher Behavior and Student Achievement" (Jere Brophy and Thomas L. Good) and "Teaching Functions" (Barak Rosenshine and Robert Stevens) are particularly relevant.

2 Bielefeldt, Talbot. *The Challenge of Classroom Discipline.* OSSC Bulletin Series. Eugene, OR: Oregon School Study Council, December 1988.

Reviewing both theoretical and research literature, Bielefeldt derives six principles that are shared by most classroom management systems and are supported by empirical studies. Preparation, clear expectations for behavior, consistent consequences, instruction, reinforcement, and relationships/respect are discussed in terms of their research bases and application to classroom situations.

Some of these principles are quite broad. Instruction, for instance, refers not only to presenting good academic lessons, but also to treating discipline as another subject that has to be taught. The author concedes that competing management theories don't always agree on the specifics of implementing these principles, and that classroom discipline problems are often compounded by exterior forces—in particular by the diversity of students. He considers several methods of organization that allow teachers to combine features from different sources into unified classroom management systems.

Written for an Oregon audience, the classroom examples are all from schools in that state, though the interviews, references, and text address national conditions. The conclusion challenges educators to implement those principles of discipline that have been shown to work, and not to use societal issues—broken families, for example, or multilinguicity situations—as excuses for giving up on difficult students.

3 Brophy, Jere, and Mary Rohrkemper. *Teachers' Strategies for Coping with Hostile-Aggressive Students*, R.S. 185. East Lansing: Institute for Research on Teaching, College of Education, Michigan State University, October 1987. 96 pages. ED 286 881.

This is the first of twelve reports scheduled to be released following a major study of twelve problem classroom behaviors. The researchers asked elementary school principals to nominate teachers who were outstanding in dealing with difficult students. For each outstanding teacher, the principals were asked to nominate one average teacher. In personal interviews, the researchers presented the ninety-eight selected teachers with vignettes of each type of behavior. (One hostile/aggressive vignette read, "This morning, several students excitedly tell you that on the way to school they saw Tom beating up Sam and taking his lunch money. Tom is the class bully and has done things like this many times.")

The teachers were asked to say how they would respond to each

hypothetical situation and to discuss the rationale for their methods. The teachers were then allowed to give open-ended descriptions of their approaches to understanding and dealing with each of the twelve problem behaviors. Both sets of interviews (vignettes and open-ended discussions) were coded for types of responses. The results show the frequency of different methods for dealing with difficult students, along with the correlation of those methods with outstanding- or average-rated teachers.

The authors are careful to note the limitations of this study. For instance, average teachers tended to refer problems to outside experts more often than do teachers rated as outstanding. Although the authors express the belief that classroom problems must be dealt with in the classroom, they note that their data do not show that referring hostile/aggressive students is a bad idea. In fact, referral may be the logical response for a less-capable teacher who is unsure of how to handle a situation.

Any study that relies so heavily on self-report data is subject to questions of reliability. To minimize the effects of errors in judgment and memory, the authors used open-ended interviewing techniques shown by earlier research to increase the reliability of responses. Coding categories were developed that yielded 80 percent agreement when used by two independent coders who had not been involved in category development.

The report may be disappointing to some because of its lack of clear-cut prescriptive results. For example, in coding the open-ended interview transcripts, "punishment" was positively correlated with the teachers having higher effectiveness ratings. Yet the vignettes showed "delivers punishment now" and "referral to the principal, the parent, or another adult for punishment" to be negatively correlated with effectiveness. Even that is a simplification: Two vignettes were presented, so a technique might have a significant relationship (positive or negative) to teacher effectiveness in one case, and not in the other.

This is a correlational, not an experimental study, so there is no attempt to control the many variables that may affect the classroom behavior of hostile-aggressive students. The authors admit they would have preferred to present more than two vignettes to each teacher. They even caution against basing policy decisions on their data. In general, however, they note that both average and outstanding teachers use rules, stated expectations, and consequences to control behavior. What sets the outstanding teachers apart is their ability to go beyond that model to provide hostile/aggressive students with alternate ways of dealing with conflict. In particular, techniques of strategy training and cognitive behavior modification seem to be favored by more highly rated teachers, though none of the study subjects had received specific training in these methods. The authors suggest that educators capitalize on the apparent acceptance of these techniques in planning inservices and teacher training.

4 Turco, Timothy L., and Stephen N. Elliott. "Assessment of Students' Acceptability Ratings of Teacher-Initiated Interventions for Classroom Misbehavior." *Journal of School Psychology* 24, 3 (Fall, 1986): 277-83. EJ 343 523.

The Children's Intervention Rating Profile (CIRP), a self-report scale developed by one of the authors, was used to evaluate the student acceptability of eight classroom interventions: public reprimand, private praise, self-monitored reprimand, self-monitored praise, public praise, private reprimand, reprimand at home, and praise at home. This was the order of acceptability, with praise at home being rated most acceptable.

The responses raise more questions than they answer. Self-monitored interventions were given low acceptability ratings by these students, but other sources report success (citations in Bielefeldt 1988, above) with student-monitored classroom management systems. These suburban Louisiana parish school students preferred to take their consequences at home. Doyle (1986, above) points out the need for research to be context sensitive, and it would be interesting to see if this preference is shared with innercity children in other parts of the country.

The authors' hypothesis is that more acceptable interventions will be more effective. Thus the low rating for public reprimand conflicts with research showing the efficacy of this kind of intervention. Resolution may lie in a more precise definition of *effective*. Like corporal punishment, public humiliation may stop disruptive behavior quickly, but

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have undesirable long-term consequences for student/teacher relationships.

Turco and Elliot emphasize that research into student acceptability is in its infancy, and the contradictions raised by their findings should probably be seen not as roadblocks but as signposts to further investigations.

5 Shulman, Judith H., and Joel A. Colbert. *The Intern Teacher Casebook*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management; San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development; and Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, 1988. 82 pages.

The articles in this volume would not strictly qualify as research. The reports are anecdotal, biased, and not replicable. However, for those very reasons they may be a valuable supplement to formal investigation.

The casebook contains personal narratives written by teacher trainees from the Los Angeles Unified School District. Each runs several hundred to a few thousand words and describes a situation or interaction that was particularly significant to the trainees during their early teaching experiences.

The authors were asked to follow a structure in their narratives, first relating their personal and professional background, then setting the context for the story in terms of school and student characteristics, time of day, and physical setting. The story itself was to have a beginning, middle, and end. The trainees were instructed to "write as vivid a picture of the account as you can."

Most of the fifteen vignettes hinge on some management or disciplinary issue—holding student interest, earning respect, responding to misbehavior, and the like. While most of the authors teach in secondary schools, most of the problems they cite are relevant to elementary and middle school grades. As in Brophy and Rohrkemper's research, the emphasis is on the attitudes teachers take into the classroom.

Because of their informal structure, the narratives elicit "between the lines" kinds of information that are usually omitted in more controlled studies. An impulsive desire to have a close relationship with her students causes a teacher to lose control of her class. A poorly prepared "easy" lesson ends up in the principal's office. The interpersonal style that works for a matronly mentor teacher does not serve her boyish trainee.

These are stories typically shared with staff in lunchrooms or with spouses at the dinner table. What make the result more than a show-and-tell exercise, however, are "Reaction" essays written for each narrative by other teachers and educational scholars. There is a certain amount of cheering from the sidelines, but also some highly critical commentary. The narratives serve to "flush out" biases and misconceptions that might otherwise go unstated. Some participants in the project are quoted as saying that the fact that they had to put their experiences in writing forced them to analyze and better understand their work.

The editors, making the point that education could benefit from a case study literature, include directions for preparing narratives in this format. Textbooks on classroom management frequently use hypothetical or composite narratives to illustrate ideas, and this genre alone would seem to provide a ready market for such material.

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